

Ad Hoc Public Works Planning Committee
Meeting Minutes
Draft

Date: Tuesday, February 2, 2009

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Millennium, All Purpose Room

Participants: George Murray, Hugh Maguire, Chip Barrett, Kelly Ross, John Mangiaratti, Arthur Benoit, Ellen Harde, Valerie Wormell, John Cunningham

CTO: 7:08 p.m.

Harde opened the discussion with suggestions to improve the draft documents posted to the Town's website. She felt they should be more user-friendly and include a preamble or introductory paragraph to tell the reader what they are viewing. Benoit suggested adding page numbers to all documents. Maguire suggested adding version numbers to the footer. Wormell to make the necessary changes.

Murray felt the draft policies might need more background information to guide the reader as to the committee's thinking when proposing the policy. As written, some of the policies are too restrictive and may need amendment to state them much more clearly. Wormell suggested holding off on finalizing the policy statements until a future meeting when all were completed.

Wormell asked the committee if the sample policy used as an illustration in the policy guide could be used as the committee's recommendation to address feedback on the lack of cost/benefit analysis in the Town Meeting presentation. Murray stated that cost/benefit analysis should be performed for services within town or for proposed changes. Benoit wanted to see a consistent market basket defined. Barrett stated comparisons between towns should be avoided because they do not address the issue of service level. The committee discussed the use and purpose of market basket comparisons concluding they had little value in demonstrating cost/benefit analyses. Mangiaratti said they were useful in learning how other towns might approach a given service level or new initiative. The committee decided presentations should be made on the basis of value, with value being defined as price and quality. The following questions should be answered when defining value, (1) Can the same service be achieved at a lower cost? (2) Can the same service level be kept at the same cost? (3) Can a higher level of service be obtained at the same cost? and (4) Will a small investment yield a large increase in service level?

The committee turned its attention to policy development, following the procedure outlined in the policy development guide.

Problem: escalating costs to maintain service level

Why it is a problem: tax revenue doesn't support or match the increases as fast as they are rising, mandatory or regulatory requirements place an added burden of delivery of

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services, too much of the budget has become non-discretionary, long term services are short changed to deliver short term services with capital projects being underfunded, short term flexibility is limited, service enhancements and new initiatives are limited
 Corrective Action: (1) identify services provided and target audience and (2) quantify the service level, (3) separate internal versus external services, (4) identify the stakeholders
 Who: Department Heads with Town Manager's office oversight

Problem: Too much credibility is put into market basket comparisons
 Why is it a problem: market basket comparisons do not accurately reflect public works services levels between communities
 Corrective Action: proposed changes in Westford will be evaluated on the value provided
 Who: Town Manager and Department Heads

Maguire asked if consolidated custodial service was being explored. Wormell indicated that many recommendations from the Commission for Efficient Town Government and Long Range Fiscal Policy reports were being investigated and custodial staffing was one of them. Wormell said consolidated custodial service was an unlikely early step because of a number of issues to address. She said school children need the security from seeing a familiar face in the hallways. On the Town side, there were very few custodians, and a large cost reduction was improbable. Small cost efficiencies might be had by carefully defining service requirements. Murray called attention to the committee's vision statement that said personnel would be addressed last. Cunningham said that staffing could not be determined without a complete facilities assessment and that job descriptions be based on that assessment. The committee agreed that when a service standard was established, it would be possible to cost out contracted versus in-house services. Wormell asked the committee to consider a policy to address employee morale.

Problem: process wasn't transparent
 Why is it a problem: morale and trust issues arose from potential organizational changes, rumors, thinking deals were being made
 Corrective Action: make the process as transparent as possible through open communication, follow up report to Town Meeting, establishing points of contact for staff and residents, provide a list of resources
 Who: Board of Selectmen

Wormell outlined the next steps for the committee. The policies would be drafted and reviewed by the ad hoc committee, Town staff and checked for consistency with existing town policies. The committee would submit their final recommendations to the Board of Selectmen for approval. The draft vision and mission statements will be reaffirmed or amended based on the new policies and finalized. The committee would begin brainstorming cost savings ideas for future investigation.

The meeting adjourned at 9:32 p.m.

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